

State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

CONNECTICUT COMMISSION ON CHILDREN
Minutes of Meeting

Commission on Children Conference Room
18-20 Trinity Street, 2nd Floor
Hartford, Connecticut

Tuesday, September 13, 2005
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Voting members present: Judith Busch, James Cordier, Representative Andrew Fleischmann, Mary Fox, Dr. Alex Geertsma, Senator Mary Ann Handley, Alison Hilding, Mary Grace Reed, Josh Piteo, Laura Lee Simon and Leslie Wolfgang.

Ex officio members (or designees) present: Department of Education (Associate Commissioner George Coleman), Office of Policy and Management (Anne Foley), Department of Correction (Mary Johnson), Department of Children and Families (Debra Korta and Josh Howroyd), Chief Court Administrator (Judge Michael Mack).

Members absent: Joseph Clary, Department of Public Health (Norma Gyle) and Department of Social Services (Sylvia Gafford-Alexander), Carl Hooper, Representative Michael Lawlor, Senator Christopher Murphy, Department of Mental Retardation (Terry Cote), Attorney General (Susan Pearlman), and John Yrchik.

Commission staff present: Elaine Zimmerman, Thomas Brooks, Elizabeth Brown, Patricia Estill, Dawn Homer-Bouthiette and Rachel Levy.

Handouts: Agenda; Minutes for April 19, 2005, May 10, 2005, June 14, 2005, CT State Department of Education Memorandum for Invitation for Submission of Student Art and Writing, Flyer for Mark Friedman presentation, Analysis of Causes of Child Poverty, CT Early Childhood Partners Strategic Plan, Issue Brief – NGA Center for Best Practices/Early Lessons from States to Promote Youth Development.

Meeting Convened

Chair Judith Busch called the meeting to order at 10:11 a.m.

Minutes

Anne Foley of the Office of Policy and Management requested that the May 10, 2005 minutes be amended as follows: In the sentence that states that Ms. Foley “said that the proposed nursing home provider tax would send four percent back to providers of seniors, many of whom also serve children”, Ms. Foley requested that the word “seniors” be changed to “services”. This change was unanimously approved.

Laura Lee Simon moved to approve the minutes of the April 19, 2005, May 10, 2005, and June 14, 2005 meetings. The motion was seconded by Dr. Alex Geertsma and was unanimously approved.

Announcement

Ms. Busch announced that, due to Election Day, the November 8 meeting would be rescheduled to November 15.

New members

Ms. Busch introduced two new appointed members of the Commission: Leslie Wolfgang and Rep. Andrew Fleischmann. The new members introduced themselves.

Homeland security

Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman said that she met again with officials at the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) after the London bombings. She told them about the Connecticut law on homeland security and children and discussed how the state could continue its work to protect children.

Ms. Zimmerman said that Commissioner Betty Sternberg of the State Department of Education (SDE) sent an invitation to schools to give children a chance to talk about how terrorism and the hurricanes have affected them. The Commission on Children is coordinating this work with the help of SDE and DEMHS.

Ms. Zimmerman said that an emerging partnership with toy companies will result in toys being delivered to children affected by the hurricanes who have relocated to Connecticut, as well as children affected by poverty and homelessness. Dr. Geertsma asked about plans to assist Connecticut children who have lost family members in the hurricanes. Family Strength and Parent Leadership Director Dawn Homer-Bouthiette said that mental health issues were discussed at a state meeting on homeland security last week.

Election of Commission Officers for 2005-2006

The election of officers for the 2005-2006 year was held. The election had been delayed from the June meeting due to a lack of quorum at that meeting. Alison Hilding read the list of nominations for Commission officers:

Chair: James Cordier
Vice Chair: Judith Busch
Secretary: John Yrchik
Treasurer: Josh Piteo

Senator Mary Ann Handley moved that the nominated slate of officer candidates, which had been presented at the May meeting, be approved as offered. The motion was seconded by Rep. Fleischmann. The Commission unanimously elected the slate of officers by voice vote.

Ms. Zimmerman thanked Ms. Busch for her dignity and commitment to the board and staff. Josh Piteo thanked Ms. Busch for her leadership on bullying and school nutrition.

Preparing for 2006 Legislation

Ms. Zimmerman said that this is a meeting to discuss concerns that should be raised legislatively this coming year.

On poverty, Sen. Handley, said that last year was a learning year. The next step is to move programs, including those in the areas of health care, food and jobs, that fulfill the state goal to reduce child poverty by 50 percent. Ms. Busch asked whether Connecticut should raise the minimum wage. Sen. Handley said that the minimum wage was raised last year, but that it has not yet been raised to a living wage.

Ms. Simon said that we need to integrate services because people are shunted from agency to agency. Sen. Handley agreed and observed that some services have been integrated for hurricane survivors. Ms. Simon said this is a primary prevention issue, and that the Commission should identify models of program integration. Legislative Director Elizabeth Brown said that the Early Childhood Partners strategic plan would integrate services. Dr. Geertsma said that the medical home model would benefit from program integration.

Rep. Fleischmann said that the legislative leadership will focus on results next year through the emergence of a results-based budgeting model. The Results-Based Accountability Work Group is placing early childhood education at the top of the list. Programs will be measured by their results, including fiscal impact. Rep. Fleischmann said that early investments produce better cost savings.

Mr. Piteo said that children need a stable home life in order to do well in school. He said that efforts need to focus on fathers, and that Rep. Gail Hamm is considering revising the no-fault divorce laws. Ms. Brown said that the Department of Social Services fatherhood pilots were intended to help fathers get jobs rather than jail them for nonpayment of child support. A new regulation allows the state to waive child support so that a father can return to school.

Ms. Zimmerman said that fatherhood work has included helping fathers who owe child support but cannot read get trained to work.

Mr. Piteo said that the state should encourage people to stay married. Ms. Wolfgang said that it is in the best interest of the child for parents to stay together, and she expressed support for measures to encourage parents to stay married.

Mary Fox said that we need to focus on breaking the cycle of poverty, in part through quality early childhood programs. She said we need to make community colleges more available. James Cordier said that we need to examine barriers to participation.

Ms. Zimmerman outlined new opportunities this year that the Commission should consider in its policy coordination role:

- (1) Early Childhood Education Cabinet
- (2) federal health funds
- (3) Healthy Kids Connecticut task force led by House Speaker James Amann
- (4) the Select Committee on Children has asked the Commission for a prevention paper

Ms. Foley said that the Commission's coordinating mandate is important because there are several state entities on children's issues. She expressed concern that some efforts may be at cross-purposes and that it may not be best to have so many individual efforts. She recommended that the Commission make a list of efforts in the statute to review whether to combine some efforts.

Sen. Handley said that pending federal welfare reauthorization, by increasing work hours and work participation rates, may place greater stress on families and more demand for child care. Ms. Busch said that many children are eligible for HUSKY health insurance but do not receive it.

Associate Commissioner George Coleman of SDE said that great work has been done on preschool, but that we need to focus more on adolescents. He said that many single mothers "surrender" their children to the street and feel that they cannot control them. Even middle-class families feel alienated from their young teens. Many children are electronically addicted. Ms. Hilding said she was concerned about children who are alone. She said that instant messaging and cell phone usage isolate children.

Debra Korta of the Department of Children and Families said that Judge Michael Mack and she heard the concerns of youths preparing to leave the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS). All were looking for support in school systems, and for places to go and things to do. Judge Mack said that all of the CJTS youths that they met have incarcerated parents. He said that these young people will not be allowed back in school.

Judge Mack said that all of the Families with Service Needs children in the justice system have mental health needs. He said that we need to position mental health and mentoring support in communities. Ms. Brown said that she attended a national meeting on youth issues in Chicago. The focus was positive youth involvement. Young people from Chicago's toughest neighborhood said at the meeting that their biggest need is a caring adult.

Mary Johnson of the Department of Correction said that too many 16- and 17-year-olds are about to be discharged from the Manson Youth Institution and have nowhere to go.

Ms. Zimmerman listed the leadership issues from the Commission staff retreat. Mary Grace Reed said that we need to show hard results, not just soft results, when we champion something. Mr. Coleman said that we need to ask collaborating agencies to provide data.

Closing

A motion to adjourn was made and was seconded at 12:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Busch
Vice Chair